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ABSTRACT

Noting that many of the functions undertaken by classroom teachers involve communication skills or skills dependent on an ability to communicate effectively, this paper outlines a course in speech communication specifically for teachers. The paper first lists the teaching, managing, and decision making activities teachers undertake that involve communication skills. It then provides brief descriptions of the course and its goals, and outlines the course units as follows: (1) human communication in the education environment, (2) interpersonal communication in the classroom, (3) listening, (4) nonverbal communication in the classroom, (5) information dispensing in the classroom, (6) leading classroom discussions, (7) small group communication in the classroom, (8) teacher influence in the classroom, (9) communication barriers in the classroom, and (10) communicating in parent/teacher conferences. Each unit description includes a sample activity. (HTH)

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Teachers as Speakers

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INTRODUCTION

Consider your teaching day. Keep a journal for only one day in which you log the amount of time you speak and the situation. Your journal entry might look like this:

9:00-10:00	Advised students
10:00-11:00	Taught class
11:00-1:00	Taught class (1 hour lecture; 1 hour small group activity)
1:00-2:00	Lunch with a colleague
2:00-4:00	Taught class (½ hour lecture; 1½ hour discussion)
4:00-5:30	Committee Meeting

Most of our day is comprised of communication. We talk with students on a one-to-one basis as well as in the classroom. We talk with colleagues in committee meetings, in the hallways, during lunch. Sometimes we may even talk with parents! Our job of teaching is really a job of communicating. Yet, most of us are ill-prepared for the major task of our job. How many teachers have had a basic speech communication course, not to mention a speech course designed especially for teachers?

Teachers perform three major functions in the classroom. They facilitate learning, manage the classroom and make decisions. The National Education Association provides a sample of actions taken by teachers as they perform these three functions:

1. Facilitating Learning

Teachers:

*Know the unique characteristics of their students and draw on this knowledge to promote learning

*Identify students' levels of achievement in subject matter and provide instruction and activities appropriate to those levels

*Identify students' learning problems and provide instruction for overcoming them

*Identify student interests and use them to promote learning

*Work with students individually when appropriate

*Organize groups which enhance learning

*Draw on a variety of techniques, materials, and technology to accommodate different learning styles

*Use questioning techniques and plan learning experience which encourage thinking and problem-solving skills

*Present subject matter

2. Managing the Classroom

Teachers:

*Organize the classroom to stimulate learning and to foster discipline

*Evaluate classroom conditions and make adjustments when necessary

*Provide opportunities for communication with parents and the community

*Communicate with special service personnel and call upon them when necessary

*Use community agencies and refer students when appropriate

*Maintain student records for instructional purposes

*Facilitate the work of classroom aides, volunteers, and paraprofessionals

3. Making Professional Decisions

Teachers:

*Decide what to teach within and across subject areas within the context of available curriculum guides

*Select and present/use materials and equipment

*Plan priorities for the day

*Reorganize activities as necessary

*Use student assessment materials for instructional purposes

*Anticipate the need for and draw on the abilities of special school service personnel such as school nurse, psychologist, social worker, librarian/media specialist, and guidance counselor

*Decide when, where, and how to work at the local, state, and federal levels for educational improvement

*Decide how to work with professional organizations, the school community, and the public-at-large to promote action on educational problems

*Decide how to deal with the external conditions which impact their roles as a teacher

*Decide how to deal with political, economic, social, and professional factors that affect their ability to function in the classroom. (1982, pl 11-12)

Notice how many of these are communication skills or are skills dependent on an ability to communicate effectively. Without training in oral communication skills, one wonders how effectively teachers can perform these functions.

CURRICULUM

What would a course in speech communication for teachers "look like"? The course outlined in the remainder of this paper presents several communication skills essential for effective teaching. The course is designed to be both theoretical and practical - providing an understanding of communication principles and practice in applying those principles (See Cooper, 1981; 1984 for complete information).

Course Description

This course is designed for teachers in all disciplines. Students learn communication concepts applicable to the classroom and communication skills necessary to communicate effectively in the classroom. The teaching methods include all those studied in the course itself - lecture, small group, discussion, structured experiences, and course readings. The course provides students with both a cognitive and an experiential understanding of the role of communication in the classroom.

Course Goals

The course is designed to develop in teachers an understanding of the communication process in the classroom, a greater awareness of the impact of their communication on students, and a variety of communication skills applicable to the classroom.

Outline of Course Units

Unit I - Human Communication in the Education Environment

This unit presents a general overview of the communication process. Two theoretical perspectives - systems and symbolic interaction- are presented and related specifically to the classroom. A definition of communication in general, and instructional communication specifically, are also discussed. A major emphasis of this unit is the importance of communication to effective teaching.

Sample Activity: Keep a journal in which you enter notes from your readings, as well as observations, articles, poems, short stories, cartoon, etc. about communication. The purpose of this journal is to help you analyze your own communication behavior and that of others as well. It should include anything that will help you meet this objective.

Unit II - Interpersonal Communication in the Classroom

In our work with students it may be the quality of our relationship with them, not the content we teach, that is the most significant element determining our effectiveness. We build these relationships through face-to-face communication with our students - through interpersonal communication.

The importance of the relationship message for teachers is evident. The relationships we create with our students affect us, our students and the educational outcome of our instruction. Much research suggests that when a teacher's communication response to students is one of "I accept you,"the achievement of students is enhanced.

Several communication variables contribute to building a positive relationship between student and teacher - self-concept, self-disclosure, perception and language and meaning. In this unit, each of the variables are examined.

Sample Activity: Consider the words student and teacher. List as many meanings of these two words as you can. Compare your list of meanings with other students in class.

Unit III - Listening

Teachers need to understand that listening is much more than hearing. Listening is a four step process - hearing, interpreting, evaluating, and responding. In addition, a major portion of our time each day is spent listening. In the classroom listening is the main channel of communication. The types of listening, barriers to listening, the concept of and skills involved in active listening, and methods of improving their own listening are all areas covered in this unit.

Sample Activity: Provide students with a classroom case

study in which poor listening inhibits effective communication. Ask students to analyze the factual, semantic, mental, and physical barriers to listening and means to combat each.

Unit IV - Nonverbal Communication in the Classroom

Some researchers indicate that 65% of the meaning one receives from a speaker's message is communicated nonverbally. Nonverbal communication areas discussed include proxemics, environmental factors, chronemics, physical characteristics, artifacts, kinesics, touch and paralanguage.

Sample Activity: Draw the seating arrangement in this class. How does this arrangement affect the communication taking place?

Unit V - Information Dispensing in the Classroom

Lecturing, although often maligned as a teaching method, can be advantageous. Lecture is neither inherently good or bad. When used appropriately it allows the instructor to present information not available elsewhere, present a framework for organizing learning, introduce content that will be developed via some other teaching method, and conserve time.

All teachers need to know how to clearly dispense information. In addition to lecturing, information dispensing includes making assignments, giving directions, presenting demonstrations, and explaining procedures.

Sample Activity: Microteach utilizing a lecture method. After viewing the videotape, analyze your strengths and weaknesses.

Unit VI - Leading Classroom Discussions

Perhaps one of the most difficult teaching methods to master is the discussion method. As teachers, most of us would like our pupils to participate more, ask more thoughtful quesitons, or engage in critical thinking more often. Students can, but we as teachers need to provide them the opportunity.

Sample Activity: Tape a classroom discussion (at least 15 minutes) in which you are involved. Classify the questions asked according to: 1) student initiated or teacher initiated; 2) level on Bloom's Taxonomy. What do your "findings" tell you about classroom discussion?

Unit VII - Small Group Communication in the Classroom

Overview: Much of our lives are spent in groups - family, peer, and professional groups. We are socialized and obtain our identity through our communication within groups. Because of the pervasiveness of groups in our life, it is important that our students are provided with experiences in small group communication. Much of what we learn about

ourselves is learned through interaction in groups. The more opportunities provided for the students to "try out" behavior in small groups and to internalize the mirrored reactions of others to these behaviors, the more effective communicators our students can be.

Sample Activity: In a microteaching situation, teach using the small group approach. Divide the class into groups, choose a task for the groups to complete. How effective were you in utilizing this approach? Did you feel comfortable? Did your groups find the experience worthwhile? What changes would you make if you used this approach again?

Unit VIII - Teacher Influence in the Classroom

As teachers we are not simply "fountains of knowledge". Learning does not occur only on the intellectual level. Student attitudes and teacher attitudes influence the learning process. Teachers have a great influence over their students - the knowledge they acquire; the skills they master; and their attitudes toward self, others and learning. In very subtle ways - by who we are, the way we communicate, and the teaching methods we employ - we influence our students. Teachers must strive to positively influence their students, since student attitudes influence their self-concept and their learning.

Sample Activity: Consider the teacher who has influenced you the most. What sort of person was he/she? Why was his/her influence so great? Write your answer in your journal.

Unit IX - Communication Barriers in the Classroom

The teaching-learning process is primarily a communication process that relies largely on the interactive behaviors of students and teachers. Any variable that prohibits effective communication can adversely affect the learning process. In this unit, several barriers to effective communication - communication apprehension, receiver apprehension, sexism, teacher expectancy, and student expectancy are discussed.

Sample Activity: Think about your educational experiences. In which classes did you communicate most? Why? Least? Why?

Unit X - Communicating in Parent/Teacher Conferences

Often times teachers feel there is no place they need effective communication skills more than when talking with parents. Techniques for enhancing parent/teacher conferences such as creating a positive atmosphere, stating any problems in positive terms, offering practical, realistic suggestions, and concluding the conference are discussed.

Sample Activity: Role-play the following situation. Discuss how the techniques discussed in class were and were not utilized. A student in your class consistently performs poorly. You think the student should be retained another year. You have called the parents in to discuss this possibilty.

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